

HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER "NEWS"

57 Hartford Street -- Phone: 863-2507 -- Email: hszc108@yahoo.com -- Website: www.hszc.org -- Nov., 2007

Dana Paramita
by Rev. Jeffrey Schneider
Dharma Talk at HSZC August 2007
(Part 2 - Continued)

In this Dharma talk, Jeffrey discusses *dana paramita* in the context of body, speech and mind. In Part 1, he discussed the *dana* of the body.

The *dana* of speech is very important. If you look at the ten great precepts that we take, more of them are concerned with speech than anything else. Attention to speech is important because it is what we use to describe the world to ourselves, to describe ourselves to ourselves, to describe others to ourselves, to describe the relationships between the world, self and others to ourselves. So when we speak, we're describing the world to ourselves and to others, letting people know what we think of how the world is. And practice is learning a new language. We're learning how to speak differently of the world, of ourselves, of others. In practice we learn to speak of ourselves as we are in relationship as opposed to separateness. We speak of ourselves in terms of our interconnectedness.

To speak of the Dharma is the speech of *dana*. Dharma means many things. Of course it means the Buddha's teaching in particular. But it also means things as it is, as Suzuki-roshi said. The way things are, cause and effect. So to speak true speech, to speak speech that illumines cause and effect for ourselves and others, this is the speech of giving, the speech of *dana*. This is also to speak in ways which helps lead others to understanding.

Speaking to and about others---you know obviously the precepts suggest that it's best if we refrain from slander or gossip. Speaking words that are true, timely, helpful and kind. So if we never said anything that wasn't true, timely, helpful and kind, if we had to meet all of those four sayings every time we opened our mouth, it would probably be a much quieter world. And probably a nicer world too. But I think that as well as attending to the prohibitory precepts, the speech of *dana* is also about not withholding the loving comment. If your friend comes into the room and it always makes you happy to see her, why don't you say, "You know every time you come into the room, it makes me happy to see you." Grateful speech is also *dana*.

And you know, on the subject of not withholding the loving comment, I must say that every time I come here to Hartford Street, I'm so deeply grateful to Myo for taking on what is a job that I could never think of taking on myself, for his patience and kindness and teaching. And for the generosity of his spirit that keeps this place open for all of us to be here. I thank you (bowing).

So we try ideally to make our speech a gift. If we proceed with *dana*, with generosity as our basis, what happens is that our world view changes. I think many of us, well I certainly, tend to live in a world of limited good. There's only so much good stuff to go around. It can be ice cream or love or money, or sex or praise or anything. And the more you get, the less there is available to me. So if someone says something nice about Albert, then there's less praise available in the world for me. It's not true. There's enough time, there's enough money, there's enough love. And if we proceed on that premise, *dana* is a natural outflow. So we don't have to be limited; we don't have to believe in a world of limited good. We don't have to have an internal culture of limited good.

The most difficult person many of us find to speak kindly to is ourselves---to give love and generous speech to, is ourselves. And the speech, the internal dialogue, which for most of never stops is something we need to repair, or remember or reform. I remember once I was doing a one-day sitting at Page Street. Usually after the first two periods, my mind will kind of calm down a little bit; but for some reason this day I was having blender brain. I don't know what was going

on but I'm sure you have all experienced it. And some time in the middle of the afternoon I imagined my poor mind, oh poor mind, I just imagined taking my poor mind and rocking it in my arms like a little baby. "Oh, poor mind, you're so upset. You don't know what to do." You know, we should be kind to ourselves. We should be kind to ourselves. And this doesn't mean neglecting to notice when we sort of miss the mark; but it means to bring ourselves kindly back to it as we would bring a child kindly back to the place she needs to be.

And then there's *dana* of the mind. This is to cultivate kind thought, forgiving thought, generous thought. One way we can do this is by paying attention to our stories. We write our stories almost instantaneously. Right? Someone comes into the room; we have a story. It doesn't matter if it's true or false; we do have a story. So one of the things we can do to practice generosity of mind, is to pay attention to our stories. For example: a man walks into the room, looks around, looks at you and walks out. One story is, "How rude, he didn't even say hello. What's wrong with him? Doesn't he think I'm worth saying hello to. He must not like me. What a snob. Maybe there's something wrong about me that he doesn't like? Maybe he can see that I'm a fake and don't belong here in this room." OR, "Gee, I wonder what's wrong with him. Maybe he forgot something. Maybe he just had to go the bathroom. Maybe he had to throw up. Maybe he's spaced out or upset." All we have really is the observable behavior of others and we choose bits of the behavior to create stories.

When we're disturbed with another, one of the things we can do is to see how many different stories we can make to fit the circumstances. It's really easy to do and it's actually kind of a game. You know, somebody's late. Maybe she got the time wrong. Maybe I got the time wrong. Maybe she got the place wrong. Maybe I got the place wrong. Maybe she's in an accident. Maybe she got sick. Maybe her mother called. Maybe her dog ran away. Maybe she had a flat tire. Any of those things could be true but the one some of us might go to is, "I'm not important enough for her to be on time for." I'm suggesting one way to practice *dana* of thought is to practice looking at our stories and realizing they are just that.

Sometimes *dana* of thought can be antidotal. A lot of meditation techniques are specifically antidotal to states of mind---anger or other afflictive emotions. If I'm very angry, I can practice loving-kindness meditation as an antidote to the state of anger. If I'm very upset, I can practice counting the breath or use a mantra to help re-form my mind and make me more disposed to generosity. And something that I have found very, very useful for me is this: I've always been convinced that I don't really sit very good *zazen*, whatever that means. After all these years, I'm still not sure that I'm doing it right, so I'm probably not. One response it to say, "Well, that doesn't matter, I'll just do it." But what has helped me most is to make it a gift. When I sit down these days, before I sit, I say, "I offer the merit of this practice for all beings in the ten directions." And sometimes I mention a few specifics. But to make-over this activity of mind and body into *dana* is a gift. And in this way, it becomes not about me. It's something to give away. And I give the best I can, the good and the bad.

The greatest *dana* I believe is the *dana* of the four bodhisattva vows: "Beings are numberless, I vow to save them." This means, not to turn away, to remain in the world of suffering and not seek, just for myself, peace. But rather to be available, to remain in the mix, and to do the best I can. And sometimes like this morning when I heard that poor man screaming, only to hold that and to wish him well.

"Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them." These are our deeply held stories and beliefs and we vow to end them, we vow to give them up in so far as they stand in the way of our usefulness to others.

(Continued on back)

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Have you seen our garden altar dedicated to John King?

THANKS: Revs. Wendy Lewis, Tova Green and Rosalie Curtis and to Diane Le Van and Cynthia Kear for their Dharma talks.

MORNING (Monday-Friday)

5:30am-6:10 Zazen - Sitting Meditation
6:10am-6:20 Kinhin - Walking Meditation
6:20am-7:00 Zazen
7:00am-7:20 Chanting (Service)
7:20am-7:35 Soji - Temple Cleaning

EVENING (Monday-Friday)

6:00pm-6:40 Zazen
6:40pm-6:50 Chanting

SATURDAY MORNING

6:30am-7:15 Zazen
7:15am-7:35 Chanting
7:35am-7:55 Soji

[BREAK]

9:10am-9:50 Zazen
10:00am-11:00 Dharma Talk followed by tea/cookies.

SUNDAYS and HOLIDAYS - Closed

RETREATS and INSTRUCTION:

- * 1-day retreats (1st Saturdays of the month)
- * Zazen instruction (brief form) 8:30am (2nd/4th Saturdays) and long form, 1pm, Third Saturdays with pre-registration.

Coming Out of the Spiritual Closet by Ron Wickcliffe (from Spring 1996 HSZC newsletter)

A close friend who felt robbed of his spirituality started attending church the last year of his life. At the time, his spiritual re-awakening was beyond my comprehension, even though we talked deeply about it. From early childhood, my reactions to Christianity had been negative; I felt like an "outsider." Later, I understood it was my homosexuality that made me different, but I'd already internalized a profound self-directed homophobia and married and fathered a child in the mistaken belief this would make me "straight."

I "came out" during the late 70's, when Harvey Milk was assassinated by Dan White, and the "Moral Majority" was targeting Castro and Polk streets, and Christian evangelists were coming here from all over the country to hold rallies. I remember a group wearing T-shirts emblazoned with "Kill a Queer for Christ" on the front and "Army of the Lord" on the back marching up Market Street singing, "Onward Christian Soldiers." Homophobic assaults became a daily fact of life, and my negative feelings about Christianity and religion, harbored

since childhood, now congealed into a seething resentment. Even so, I felt something important was missing from my life, but became seriously agitated when I tried to talk or think about it.

I discovered HSZC in 1993 and for over a year immersed myself in daily practice, read dozens of Zen books, bought a zafu and started sitting at home. I became a Doan, attended one-day sittings, thought about taking lay initiation, was elected to the Board and volunteered at the hospice. In other words I went from one extreme to the other. Then I experienced a strong backlash. I stopped attending zazen completely and stayed away from the Zen Center several months - trying to separate religious dogma from my meditation experience.

What I came to realize is that people express their spirituality according to their own needs. The danger for everyone is a descent into destructive fanaticism, treating those who do not share their beliefs with contempt or worse. A long painful head-banging process ensued before I got it through my thick skull what "just sitting" meant. Zenshin often told me, "Just sit, dammit." I am deeply grateful to both HSZC and Zenshin for this realization. And I now understand my dying friends re-discovery of his long-denied spirituality. Anytime I suppress part of my soul, I am hiding. And there is always another closet to come out of-- sexual, political, HIV, spiritual, emotional.

* Ron Wickcliffe remembered HSZC in his will and in our temple garden, there is bench donated in his honor by HIV sitting group member, Allen Balderson. Ron died in Sept., 2001 at Coming Home hospice.

DANA Continued....

"Dharma gates are endless." You know the fact that delusions are boundless and dharma gates are endless is interesting because it means that they're co-terminous. Every delusion is also a potential dharma gate. Every time I have an unpleasant thought it can be an opening into the dharma for me. I can see the nature of that thought. And to accept all things with the generosity of mind as the teaching for myself and others and to make use of all circumstances in my life as potential gifts of dharma for others. Issan told me a story once He and Suzuki-roshi were talking and Issan said to Suzuki-roshi, "You know Roshi, some times I think it's too late for me." I think what he meant was that he had been too way out for too long. There had been too much damage done. And Suzuki-roshi didn't try to pat him on the head, "No, no, little Issan, it's ok." He said, "Maybe so. But maybe not for the others who will come after you." So you don't plant the seed of a tree necessarily to be around for it to bloom. This is *dana* too. Dharma gates are endless.

"Buddha's way is inexhaustible; I vow to attain it." This is the essence of our practice, of the great vehicle, to ultimately have in mind that we must extinguish greed, hate and delusion in order to be authentic to others, in order to help liberate ourselves and others from suffering. And *dana* is also allowing others to give us this. And generosity, is giving up the ideas of self, of who we are, what we need to be, what we think we need to be, who we think we need to be. This is very intimately connected to the idea of *annata*, non-self, no abiding self.

Giving is the bodhisattva's awakening. So whatever we give, again and again and again, is the bodhisattva's awakening, is our awakening that we share with each other. And the training ground for that giving is here. Just here! Thank you.

SPECIAL THANKS and GRATITUDE

The HSZC Sangha would like to offer their sincere thanks and deep gratitude to the Rev. Rin McCarthy who so capably and generously coordinated the temple activities for the month of October while Myo was away. With grateful bows!